

## Advocacy Day Tips

On an Advocacy Day, parents, teachers, students and staff from community schools in Illinois will visit legislators and their staff and give them a personal perspective on community schools and afterschool programs, and why they should support this important work in Illinois. Below you will find some tips on how to prepare for your visit, before, during and after the Advocacy Day on April 29<sup>th</sup>. And thanks for participating!

### Before the Visit

- Know your legislators.** Find your state legislators on the [Illinois State Board of Elections](#) website. Call or email your representatives in advance to see if they are available to speak with you on Advocacy Day. If you are not able to set-up time with them in advance do not worry, you can just stop by their office on the 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Get informed.** Familiarize yourself with our key messages and [talking points](#). Think about how you might start a conversation with your representative. Why is it important for your legislators to support your asks? Be prepared to tell your legislators how many of his/her constituents are served at your community school and what will happen if our programs are cut. Fact sheets for your legislators will be available before and during the event.

### On Advocacy Day

- When you arrive in Springfield, **head to the Lincoln Public Library** – 326 South 7<sup>th</sup> Street – Carnegie Room North & South, for a short advocacy training and lunch ([Advocacy Day Agenda](#)).
- The advocacy training begins at 10:30am.** Participants will be provided with a toolkit that includes background on community schools/afterschool, our key messages, and materials to share with elected officials.
- Lunch will be provided after the training.**
- Bring a photo ID.** At the Capitol you will be asked to present a photo ID. Please remember that we will be going into a government building and may be asked to wait in lines at security.
- Dress appropriately.** Business attire is expected as we will be representing community schools and afterschool programs across the state when we speak with state legislators. You can also wear a t-shirt from your community school or afterschool program.
- Wear comfortable shoes.** You will be walking a lot to and from meetings throughout the day.
- If you cannot find your legislator's office, there are information desks both in the Capitol and Stratton offices (2<sup>nd</sup> floor) to help you. **Your advocacy toolkit includes a map to help you [locate your legislator's office](#).**
- Your legislator may be in session, do not be discouraged. **Let his/her staff member know you were there to speak to them, and ask if there is a better time to come back.** Legislators may have committee hearings afterwards – consider heading to those and meet your legislator before or after the committee hearing.
- If you **do** get to speak to your legislator **be confident and precise.** Remember, they are busy but they do want to hear from you.
- If your Representative is in session,** you can go to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor outside the doors to the House Chambers,

write the name of the legislator you'd like to see on the back of your business card, and POLITELY hand it to the official at the door asking him to pass your card to the legislator. Be patient, wait for your legislator to come out and talk to you. It may take half an hour or even longer. You'll see other people by the House Chambers doing the same thing, and will be able to catch a glimpse of the proceedings while you wait.

- If you are **not** able to speak with them or their staff, **leave them with a copy of the materials provided during the training.**

### During Your Visit

- Introduce yourself.**
- Start on a positive note by finding common ground.** For example, if your legislator recently voted in support of an issue that benefits your community, thank them.
- Clearly state our top line talking point.** This is important if your meeting is cut short.
- Use a **personal anecdote** and **support it with data.** Explain how the asks you are making of them affect you and your community; make sure legislators understand the personal ramifications or benefits resulting from their actions.
- Your legislator may ask questions – remember that it is OK to say **“I’m not sure, but I can follow up and provide additional information”** if you cannot answer the question. That provides you with another chance to connect with your legislator and share more information.
- As them to take a specific action**, such as reinstating Teen Reach for FY15 and leaving it in the FY16 budget, or including \$5million for an Expanded Learning Program in the ISBE budget.
- Thank them** for their support as you leave. You can also **invite them to visit your community school** when they are home in-district, to see first-hand the impact your community school has on students, parents, and the community.
- Tweet about your visit to Springfield!** If your Legislator has a Twitter handle don't forget to include them and thank them for their time. You'll also want to include relevant hashtags, **#communityschools**, **#TeenREACH**, **#twill**, and **#saveafterschool** to connect your message to the greater community school movement.

### After the Visit

- Leave the packet** of information we provided you at the training in your legislator's office, especially if they were not there to meet.
- Share the results of your visits with Federation staff, including insights about legislator's concerns, via our [Legislative Visits Feedback Form](#).
- Maintain ongoing communication with legislators** and their staff through letters, calls, and visits.
- Find out when legislators will be home in the district and **organize a local visit.** We have tools on our [website](#) to help you [Organize a Legislative Site Visit](#).